Positivism

Reality exists independently of what anyone thinks, believes or knows about it

Science is about ***explaining*** causal relationships -- strong focus on causality and more explicitly on direct cause and effect

The objective is to explain how ***groups*** of people behave (to generalize); individual behavior is of little interest and is treated largely as part of the variance (deviation from the central tendency)

Do not try to interpret an actor's perception or understanding of "reality" -- this is meaningless because every individual's perception of reality will differ

Strong reliance on the deductive scientific method -- theories generate formal hypotheses, which can then be tested by collecting empirical evidence

Very strong emphasis on quantitative evidence and on statistical approaches to analyzing data

All evidence should be empirical and verifiable

Researchers should strive for objectivity

Favored research ***designs*** include experimental and "survey" (cross-sectional, longitudinal) designs; favored research ***methods*** include questionnaires, tests

Researcher must try not to "change" or "disturb" the phenomenon he/she is studying

Researcher must ***not*** insert his or her interpretation of what people say or do into the scientific process

Critical Realism

Reality exists independently of what anyone thinks, believes or knows about it ***and*** how people perceive of it

Scientists need to explain causal relationships **and** understand how they came about

There are causal linkages or mechanisms that operate in all social phenomena, but cause and effect may not be direct

Social structure is critial -- all human agency (action) has meaning within the pre-existing social structures in which the actor exists

Understanding ***general patterns*** of behavior by groups of people (generalization) is important, but understanding ***individual behavior and perception*** is a useful and valid part of research

It is possible to separate structure and agency for research purposes ***but*** the two are equally valid and important aspects of social reality

Science requires a "depth ontology" in which many kinds of evidence are valid -- the directly observable rarely provides a full understanding or explanation of complex social phenomena

Uses the deductive approach to research, but relies much less on formal hypotheses

The choice of both research ***design*** and ***method*** is determined by the nature of the research question

Researchers should strive for objectivity, but the researcher's interpretation of what people say and do is valid as long as it is justified

Researchers should try to minimize their own effect on the people and phenomena they study, but complete separation is impossible

Constructivist

All reality is a social construction -- it is created when people interact and does not exist independent of specific people interacting

Science is about ***understanding how people perceive their reality***

Causality is unimportant

Some strict interpretivists treat every individual's experience and perceptions as a separate equally valid reality while others do try to develop general models or groupings; there is little reason to try to generalize

Deductive scientific method is invalid; formal hypotheses or even the more general "propositions" often used by realists are not used

Resarch design is not very important; strong reliance on oral history, ethnography and other research ***methods*** that maximize the researcher's ability to gain an in-depth understanding of how the participant experiences his/her reality

Objectivity on the part of the researcher is an impossibility and is unnecessary

The researcher inevitably changes the nature of the phenomena he/she studies and the outcomes of social processes; minimizing effect is impossible

Research findings and conclusions, like all other aspects of reality, are constructed and arise from the interactions of the actors (participants, researchers)

The researcher's interpretation of what people say and do is a valid research conclusion and requires no justification